

The Real Food Thesis

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

By

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrea Wolfe", with a stylized, cursive script.

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Abstract:

They told me that I could not do it, that I could not survive on a diet of unprocessed, organic, whole food on a college budget, cooking it all myself. In response to this claim that surviving on whole foods was an impossible challenge for a college student like myself, I decided to change my diet drastically: no prepackaged food, nothing processed, and, essentially, no eating out. I challenged myself to live on whole food while on a college student's budget for one semester. I blogged throughout the project, discussing cooking, benefits of different foods, and current news articles. I also meticulously tracked every penny I spent. After completing the experiment, I have concluded that while eating whole foods on a college budget is maintainable, I prefer a hybrid of home-cooked meals and convenient prepackaged foods when I want them.

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I would like to thank Dr. Wolfe for advising me through this project. She helped me stay focused and on track.

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Author's Statement

They told me that I could not do it, that I wouldn't survive on a diet of unprocessed, organic, whole food on a college budget, cooking it all myself. Wanting to prove my friends and family wrong was motivation enough to use my Honors thesis to test my resolve and my cooking abilities. I wanted to demonstrate to myself and to my family and friends that I could eat this way, while also making the project an academic process. I began this experiment on August 19th and ended on December 7th of 2013. I created a blog to record my progress, my triumphs and my failures at www.realfoodthesis.blogspot.com. I tracked every penny I spent on food for every single meal, calculating the average cost per meal and per day throughout the semester. In the end, I was successful; I spent less money than the average college student on food, while maintaining a healthy whole food diet. In this document, I will describe my thesis through the initial rules I established, navigation of the blog, research in calories and diet, cooking techniques, news articles, benefits of different foods, calculations of cost, and my personal reactions to this project.

I based my experiment on others that have already occurred. In *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, Barbara Kingsolver and her family spent one year living off food produced within a 100-mile radius of their home. She was fortunate to live on a farm where they grew the bulk of their food. They also avoided processed food because it was not grown or made in that radius. The focus of their project was on how much fossil fuels were used to transport food to their plates. Blogger Lisa Leake has created a project even more similar to mine. She keeps a blog, *100 Days of Real Food*, and challenges her readers to follow what she is doing. She has eliminated processed food, like I did in my project. Her restrictions also include no white flour or white rice, no refined sweeteners, no deep fried foods, and no "fast foods."

Using these two examples as my inspiration, I created my own rules. On the blog, these were found in “The Rules” tab on the website. They are also printed on page 5 of the blog document. I will abbreviate my rules here. For the duration of the project, I planned to not eat: preservatives, artificial flavors, added colors, and prepackaged processed foods. I also intended to try to eat food that was organic and not genetically modified when it was a budget-friendly option. I did not always stick to my rules perfectly, as I will describe in later paragraphs. I revisited my definition of processed food in the blog post “Defining Processed Food” on page 58. Here, I broadened and clarified my definition to allow processed whole-wheat flour and other foods that are technically made up of more than one ingredient, which contrasted the United State Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) definition of processed food. Using other people’s experiments as models as well as articulating and revisiting my rules aided me in sticking with this project.

I tried to make my online blog easy to navigate for my reader. There were three sections to the blog: the blog itself, a section that discussed the purpose of my project, and a section to define the rules. I tagged each post with keywords, and these keywords were listed in a navigation toolbar called “Thoughts” on the right of the screen. There was also a search bar, so that the reader could search for a specific post. Below these, there was the Blog Archive, which listed all of the posts sorted by month. Anyone could have subscribed to receive my blog posts by email during the project so that they would not miss a post. Unfortunately, Blogger did not allow me to track how many people subscribed to my blog. I also posted links to each blog post on Facebook as well as Google+ in order to draw in a larger audience. I had three regulars who commented on my blog as well as several friends

who would comment on my posts on Facebook. The names of commenters have been changed to protect their identity.

The print version included with this document is organized a bit differently. There is a table of contents that lists all of the posts in chronological order. They are preceded by "The Rules" and "The Project," which explain to the reader what I did and why I did it. I did not list the keywords that I used to tag each post, but I did include the comments left by readers. I have also edited the print version to fix spelling and grammar errors in the posts and corrected capitalization in the post titles for consistency. I also edited the comments for capitalization. Some posts do refer back to previous posts. On the blog, I connected posts through hyperlinks, but, on the print version, I simply listed the corresponding page numbers. To get the most out of my blog, I recommend reading it from start to finish. Knowing that this is a daunting task, I ask that readers of this document read at least some of the posts highlighted in my artist statement. In order to learn even more about a particular topic, readers may look for titles of relevant blog posts included in the discussion of that topic or in parenthesis following the sentence. Readers will find these posts in the attached document, which includes all blog posts created for this project.

One area that I studied throughout this project was calories and diet. In a post on September 3rd, I contemplated the sensation of hunger and discussed its relation to the hormone ghrelin that transmits the "I'm hungry" signal from the stomach to the brain (Zelman) ("Am I Hungry or Not?", p. 46). By following my body telling me that I was hungry, I was able to manage my calorie intake during the project without counting calories. This did result in me losing five pounds only three weeks into the project since the new diet was not as calorie dense as processed food. I was hungry for a lot of the project, as

I did not have easy access to food on campus away from home. By mid-September, I began to wonder if I was meeting my daily caloric needs. According to the My Plate program by the USDA, someone at my height and weight needs 2,000 calories a day with 40-60 grams of protein (“How Many Can I Have?”). The week that I tested my calorie intake, I reached 1,222-1,945 calories (“Energy and its Costs”, p. 68). This data backed up what my body was feeling. In hindsight, I determined that, during the first few weeks of the project, I was not getting enough calories and protein. I did go to a dietitian on October 1st in order to figure out if I had any nutritional deficiencies in my diet. I was not impressed with the help that I received, as I felt I knew more than the dietician. Therefore, I did not have any professional oversight during this project, something that I would change if I did it again (“The Dietitian”, p. 76). Having a professional involved may have helped me prevent my calorie and nutrition issues in the beginning of the project.

In addition to learning about calories, I also learned how to cook new foods. Before August, my main cooking experiences had been on a hearth or wood-burning stove at Conner Prairie. I have worked at Conner Prairie Interactive History Park since I was 13. The women there taught me to cook biscuits, soup, and other dishes over an open fire. However, the techniques that we use at Conner Prairie are different from working on a modern stove with the capability to set specific temperatures. I tend to find modern cooking equipment a bit confusing at times, due to my introduction to cooking at Conner Prairie. On September 20th, my friend Elizabeth came over to help me overcome some of my difficulty with cooking. She taught me how to make hummus and lentil soup since I needed more protein in my diet (“Invasion of the Beans”, p. 65-66). This was the first time I used a crockpot to slow cook a soup. We put all the ingredients in, and it was done in a few

hours. The hummus was simple as well. Later in the semester, I made cauliflower mac and cheese (“Not So Vegan Mac n’ Cheese”, p. 103-104). I had bought a head of cauliflower from the farmer’s market and it was going to expire soon. The original recipe called for replacing the noodles with chopped up cauliflower (Scott-Hamilton). It also used soy milk and soy cheese, but I replaced these with regular cheese and milk as I was not vegan. It turned out to taste more delicious than I expected.

Finally, the most challenging meal I made was Thanksgiving dinner for my family. I was ambitious enough to bake a 22-pound turkey (“Thanksgiving Part 1: Cooking” & “Thanksgiving Part 2: The Feast”, p. 136-141). I used techniques learned from cooking whole chickens to prepare the turkey. This included putting butter and herbs under the skin. I also used a Reynolds’s Turkey Bag in the oven in order to keep the moisture in. This worked to a degree, but after four hours in a hot oven, anything will start to dry out. Therefore, I tried to make gravy to moisten the turkey, but it turned into gelatinous goo. It was a lot harder to make than I had ever thought. However, overall, dinner was successful, and my whole family did enjoy the turkey.

Another aspect that I tried to include in the blog was commentary on news articles that I read. Early on in the project, one of my friends sent me the article “Intense Flavor’: The \$330,000 Burger That Was Built in a Lab Hits the Spot” by Alastair Jamieson and Alan Boyce. It discussed a test tube burger, essentially meat that had been cultured and grown in a lab. This burger had recently gone through test tasting by a famous food writer who described it as juicy but missing the fatty element. The chef that prepared the meat did have to add breadcrumbs, egg, salt, and pepper to enhance texture and taste. It was an interesting concept, as no animals were harmed in making it (“Future of Meat”, p. 11-12). I

also discussed two books that I read for the Down to Earth seminar out of the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry, a 15-credit-hour, interdisciplinary, and immersive seminar that I took during the Fall 2013 semester. This seminar was focused on issues related to sustainable agriculture, and two of the books we read were *Salt, Sugar, Fat* by Michael Moss and *The Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollan. *Salt, Sugar, Fat* discusses how food can impact your mood and how processed food is engineered for pleasure so that we will buy and eat more of it ("Salt, Sugar, Fat... and Bliss", p. 17-18). In *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Pollan touches on the term "organic," noting that it is not well defined in the food industry. The same goes for "free range;" the use of this term on meat packaging does not necessarily mean the animals have full access to the outdoors ("Is 'Organic' a Magic Word?", p. 28). I also covered a series of articles on whether or not the food we eat today is even real. I discussed food safety and food poisoning in "What is Safer, your Food or Another's?" on page 37. The article I discussed on page 39 deals with transparency in slaughterhouses and how companies are slowly allowing consumers to see what goes on inside ("Do We Truly Want to Know What is in our Food?"). One of my favorite articles was one we discussed in my seminar, "Fake Foods You Are Eating" by Mandy Oaklander. I was amazed to discover that processed cheese was originally called embalmed cheese and that there is no milk or chocolate in Oreos ("Is Your Food Real??", p. 49). All of these articles and books, plus others discussed throughout the blog, enhanced the academic depth for this project.

Another strong academic component of my honors thesis was my research on the benefits of different foods. The most popular post of this type was the one on sugar. It can be found on page 22. Here I compared five different types of sugar: Domino's Organic Sugar, Sugar in the Raw, Sucanat, honey, and Wholesome Sweeteners Organic Sugar. They

were compared based on cost and how well they met the criteria for my project, particularly whether or not they were organic. I concluded that the best sugar was Wholesome Sweeteners Organic Sugar. I got a lot of response from my readers for this post. I also wrote a post on the benefits of kale and beets. Before doing this research, I did not know that kale is high in vitamin C and K, which is good for the immune system and bone health respectively (Lewis). I also learned that beets could help with depression and lower blood pressure (Dumas). Throughout the project, trying these new foods forced me to research their benefits, which persuaded me to continue eating them.

Along with researching the health benefits of certain foods, I also calculated the costs of this whole food diet. The purpose of this project was to prove that eating healthy, organic, unprocessed food was possible on a college student's budget. In order to prove that my diet was affordable, towards the end of my experiment, I created an online survey with SurveyMonkey to ask my peers several questions about their diet and spending habits on food. I did the survey at the end of the project so that the results would not cause me to alter my own eating and purchasing habits. If I knew that the average college student paid \$15 a day on food, for example, than I might have allowed myself just as much, even if it skewed my calories and nutrients. Forty-four students participated in my survey, 41 females and 3 males. Participants ranged in class level from freshman to doctoral, but nearly half of them were juniors at 21-22 years of age. Only 21% of my participants had a dietary restriction. The questions on the survey asked the participants how much of their food bill was paid by family or friends, how much they ate out per week, and how much they spent on average on food per day. Over half of my respondents said they spent \$10 or less on food per day. For those who lived off-campus and not with their parents, 75% spent

under \$10 per day, with 33% under \$5 per day. SurveyMonkey allowed me to sort my data by applying filters that would restrict the results to a certain variable. The amount of money spent on food per day changed when students were responsible to 90-100% of their food costs. Their daily spending on food jumped; 36% spent \$5-\$10, 36% spent \$15-\$20, 14% spent \$0-\$5, and 14% spent \$20-\$25. For this filter, half lived in the dorms, so it may not be an accurate representation of my situation because I do not live on campus.

I also compared my spending to what a meal plan costs on campus. I went into depth on meal plans in the post “The Price of Money” on page 60. Ball State University has several different meal plans with varying amount of meals per week. From my understanding, meal plans are offered with 5, 10, 14, 18, and 21 meals per week. Students may spend \$4.45 on breakfast, and lunch and dinner swipes are each worth \$7.85. If a student is eating 21 meals per week in the dining halls, they are paying \$20.15 per day or \$141.05 per week or \$564.20 per month (“Value Plans and Dining Plus”). By eating off-campus, my food costs are nearly one-fifth of that of a student eating 21 meals on campus. This is profound savings considering that I was eating healthier and higher quality food.

In the end, I found that I could eat whole food on a college student’s budget. I determined that an off-campus student paid \$0-\$10 a day on food. I averaged \$4.88 per day over the 100 days I tracked over the semester. I averaged \$34.19 per week and \$136.75 per month, eating \$488.39 of food over the entire project. I also calculated the food that I wasted, or threw away, during this project. In total, I wasted \$47.93, which was 7.6% of what I spent on food total. I spent \$630.66 on food in total; the difference between this number and \$488.39 included food waste and uneaten food. The weekly averages of what I

spent on food per day can be seen in Figure 1. There were some weeks when I was sick; so, during these periods I spent less money on food.

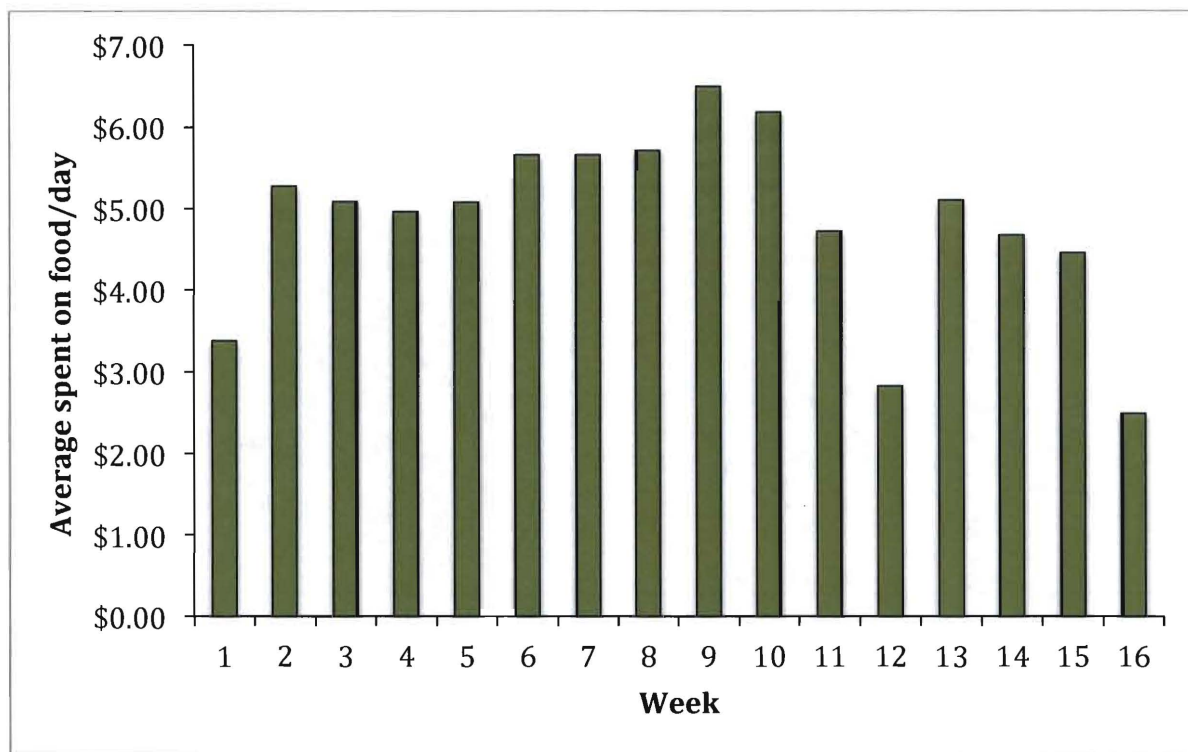


Figure 1. Average spent of food per day for each week of the experiment.

There were two main things that contributed to variations in my data collection: free food and eating processed food. I figured that most college students seek out free food and are fed by their parents when they go home to visit. Therefore, I allowed myself to accept free food and food offered by my parents when I was home. In a blog post on free food, I even discussed my visit to Becker Farms with the Down to Earth seminar group. Becker Farms, a family farm located in Mooresville, Indiana, helped to sponsor the Down to Earth seminar. During our visit, the Beckers provided us with lunch (“A Deviating Lunch”, p. 29). I felt that it would have been rude not to accept the food I was given because I was

raised to be a gracious guest. On occasions like this one, when there was free food available, I tried to only take what I could eat according to my rules anyway. When I went home for weekends, I tried to stick to the rules so I would not feel ill from eating processed food, but, at the same time, I ate what my parents put in front of me as it was often a cheaper and less stressful option than cooking all of my own food. I did not calculate the days at home and on the trip to Washington, DC, into my total spent on food, because I was not purchasing the food at my parents' house and the trip was full of processed food ("Change of Plans", p. 50). Therefore, the meals that I had on these occasions did not impact my data.

Meanwhile, there were a few days that I deviated greatly from my rules. For instance, after I returned home from a trip to Washington, DC, in early September, I did not eat according to my diet for one day ("I Made a Mistake", p. 55-56). I had food available, but I chose to eat processed food because it was easier. It took some determination to go back to my diet, as it was more time consuming. Another example of when I broke my rules occurred on October 23rd when the power went out at my house ("Circumstances Outside of My Control", p. 101). I did not want to eat anything from the fridge, as to avoid opening the door, so in order to keep the food cold I obviously could not cook anything. Therefore, I went to the dining halls to eat breakfast and bought my lunch from Jimmy Johns. I did include these purchases into my totals, as my evening meal was homemade, and I calculated average cost per day. I tried to eat simple foods throughout that day, but they were still processed. Both accepting free food and eating processed food impacted my decision as to which days to include in my calculations, I ate on my diet 100 days out of a possible 112 days; that is 89% of the time.

People said that I would not be able to survive without processed food. When told I cannot do something, I am often more determined to do it. I undertook this project to prove to myself and others that I could, indeed, survive on whole foods even on a college budget. This project was a great learning experience for me. I learned how to cook and how to read the signals my body gave me to determine the kinds of food I needed. I struggled a lot with hunger and not eating enough. By the end of the semester, I had unintentionally lost 10 pounds. I regret not having this experiment overseen by a dietitian; however, the lack of guidance from an expert forced me to seek out the nutritional information for myself. That made the project a more useful learning experience. It is also interesting to consider how this project has impacted me in the long term. After ending the experiment, it took me a few weeks to adjust back to a typical American diet. Even now, two months later, I still do not eat much processed food, as it sometimes makes me ill. In addition, I still cook most of my food, as habits are hard to break. It is nice, though, to be able to pick up food from a dining hall or vending machine if I am hungry instead of waiting until I get home to cook all of my own meals. I am thankful for the experience of doing this project, as I feel that this experiment will shape my eating habits for years to come. It was also nice to prove my friends and family wrong.

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The Real Food Thesis Blog

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<http://www.realfoodthesis.wordpress.com>

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The Project

For my Honors Thesis at Ball State University, I have proposed to cook all my meals for the fall semester 2013 from scratch. This blog will document my meals throughout the semester as well as research relating to food, health, and the environment. I want to investigate the origins of whole foods versus those of processed food, why preservatives are commonly added to foods, and how they impact the body. I also want to explore what it means for food to be classified as organic or genetically modified and what that means for the consumer. My objective is to learn how to cook healthily, where my food comes from, and why there are preservatives and artificial ingredients in prepackaged food.

The Rules

Here are the basic rules that I will be following for the duration of this project:

I will not eat:

- Preservatives
- Artificial flavors
- Added colors
- Prepackaged processed foods*

I will eat:

- Whole foods

If possible and budget friendly I will also eat organic and GMO (genetically modified organisms) free. I also want to try to eat free-range animals and eggs as well as grass fed dairy.

These rules may be compromised through trips, eating out on campus, and holiday meals. That is part of the experiment, so see where the limits lie. I will detail these as well on my blog.

*For an update on my definition of processed food, see the post "Defining Processed Food" on page 58.

Monday July 1, 2013

Green Soup - A Good Start

I decided that this summer would be a good time to learn how to cook new things that I would want to make this fall. A few weeks ago, I got the book *Ladled* by Kimberly Harris, which is turning out to be pretty neat so far. Today I made her (Dark) Green Soup.



The ingredients: butter, onion, garlic, kale, chicken stock, potato, thyme, spinach, heavy cream, and lemon juice.



It went together alright. I did not make the chicken stock myself, so that goes against the guidelines for this fall. I think it is ok for now, as I am easing myself into this project. Something of note, is that I have never had onions make my eyes water that much, ouch!!

The kale and spinach cooked down well, but not as much as expected. The potatoes also did not turn to much as I had hoped. Therefore, I got the food processor down to use, as I could not find the top to the blender in the cabinet. Poring the soup in created a mess, but not as much as the food

processor not being watertight. I would post a picture of the mess but that was not my priority :).

The end result was a smooth soup. I like the lemon juice, as it adds more flavor. I think I put a little too much in though. I wish the soup was thicker, so I should add more potato next time. Overall, it turned out good, pretty delicious actually. It is a good way to get green vegetables in your diet.



I complemented the soup with organic applesauce (only ingredient is apples), 2% unhomogenized milk, and some rosemary and olive oil crackers (unbleached wheat flour, semolina flour, water, olive oil, rosemary, sea salt). I think this is a good start in eating unprocessed and trying new foods.

Source:

Harris, Kimberly. "(Dark) Green Soup." *Ladled: Nourishing Soups for All Seasons*. Las Vegas: Victory Belt Pub., 2012. 156-57. Print.

Comments:

Lori on July 2, 2013 at 3:15 PM

Did you freeze any for the fall? :)

Tuesday, July 2, 2013

Split Pea Soup

Finally, I have found a split pea soup that is the same as one I had years ago. It was cooked on a cast iron cook stove in the 1886 Liberty Corner area at Conner Prairie Interactive History Park where I work. We used ingredients fresh picked from the garden. No soup until now has tasted as good and I think those fresh ingredients were key to the flavor. I have tried commercial split pea soups, both organic and non-organic and they just did not taste good.



The split peas came from Earth Fare, a grocery store whose produce comes within 100 miles of the store. Although they are not quite in season, it is a good start especially for \$1.69 for a pound (which was all I needed).

The carrots were also organic, costing \$2.99 for a bag, which I used around a quarter of one bag. The rest will be great cut up in my lunches for this week.

The spices, thyme, oregano, salt, and bay leaf, were already in my cabinet and should be common in most homes. Therefore, they cost me nothing for this soup.

I grow my own onions, they are called walking onions and are small but strong. This soup needed one large onion, so I used a few on my smaller onions. I do not put pesticides on them, so they should be just as good as certified organic onion. In fact, they are probably better.

The chicken stock was the Earth Fare brand and organic. It is on my to-do list to make my own stock, but since my experiment has not officially begun, I will allow the store bought stock. It cost me \$2.28 per bottle and the soup used two.

Finally, I used butter as the fat. All I have in the house is Land O Lakes stick butter, not organic or grass-fed. It works for now and did not cost me anything.



So how much did this soup cost me?

| | |
|----------------------------|--------|
| Split peas (1.17lb) | \$1.98 |
| Carrots..... | \$0.75 |
| Chicken stock..... | \$5.31 |
| Spices, onion, butter..... | \$0.00 |

Total: \$8.04

There are probably 10 servings of soup, therefore it is about \$0.80 per serving. That is about the same price as Ramen but it tastes a TON better and is good for you!



YUM!!!

I plan to revisit this recipe this fall, and recalculate the expenses with homemade stock and organic grass fed butter. It will be interesting to see the differences.

Thursday, August 1, 2013

Last Hoorah.... Maybe

As the start date approaches for my project (17 days, 3 hours, 20 some odd minutes as I write this post), I have realized a few things. I am starting to fear the foods that I will be "banned" from during this project.

Here are some foods I think that I will miss:

- Ice cream
- General junk food (think vending machines)
- M&Ms and other chocolates
- Being able to satisfy a craving instantly
- Eating out at restaurants

The more I think about it, I will be able to have some of these foods, it will just take more work and some creativity. For instance, I can make my own ice cream. Who knows, I may not miss the junk food as much.

Since I do fear the loss of these foods, I have been eating them more as of late, almost as if I need to take advantage of them while I still have time. And honestly, I haven't felt very good and I am craving the start of my experiment. I want to eat clean food, carrots, fresh veggies, and to know where my food comes from.

It is going to be an exciting and enlightening semester!

Monday, August 5, 2013

Future of Meat

My friend Ed just sent me an interesting article from NBC News. It discusses a test taste of a new but not so new food today, the test tube burger.

My initial reaction was to wonder how they did it. Mark Post, a physiologist at the University of Maastricht, developed this meat substitute. The muscle tissue was grown in a petri dish starting from stem cells, but these can be collected from a biopsy of a live cow. Breadcrumbs, egg, salt, and pepper were also added to improve texture and taste of the patty. I am led to believe that no animals were harmed in the making of this burger.

It was taste tested by Josh Schonwald, a food writer, and Hanni Rutzler, a food researcher. They both commented that the texture was good, juicy, but missing the fatty element.



John Schonwald eating the burger. From nbcnews.com.

After reading the article, I am unsure if I would eat an engineered food. I would probably enjoy it if I did not know where it came from. However, the more I think about it, would you like test tube meat, or CAFO (concentrated animal feeding operation) meat? I will go more into CAFOs in a later blog post and why I chose not to eat them for my project. I don't think this test tube burger would meet the qualifications.

What do you think, is this new technology of producing food, or at least hamburgers for now, has a viable future in the United States or the world? I personally think we should decrease eating of meat instead of resorting to such measure, but hopefully this semester will give me time to reflect on this issue more.

Source:

Jamieson, Alastair, and Alan Boyce. "'Intense Flavor': The \$330,000 Burger That Was Built in a Lab Hits the Spot." *NBC News: Science*. NBC News, 5 Aug. 2013. Web. 5 Aug. 2013.

Comments:

Esther - August 19, 2013 at 2:10 PM

I found this post very interesting, Chris, from an animal-rights standpoint, a health one, and economic one, as well. I like the fact that apparently no animals are harmed in the creation of the meat. Also, I like the idea that it could cut back on factory farming, which would free up resources to produce other foods. But, there is the question of the impact on the human body of eating foods that were grown in a lab. On the one hand, this is about as far from "natural" and "organic" as one can get. On the other hand, there is the idea that this meat has been exposed to fewer chemicals, because it was grown with a focus purely on the meat itself, not the animal, if that makes sense. It is easier to make the meat pure if that is the only thing involved. I wonder what kind of growth hormones, if any, are needed to make this meat? Finally, economically it is an interesting quandary. There is of course the current price tag, \$330,000. Will it become cheaper? If so, that could be good for the consumer. But at the same time, how is it going to harm agriculture and the current cattle industry? So many questions, so few answers! But, it is very interesting. I am enjoying the blog!

Christine Kincaid - August 19, 2013 at 9:51 PM

Esther, animals may or may not be harmed when harvesting stem cell tissue from live cattle in order to grow more muscle tissue out of it. They are unclear in the article. We are a long way away until this can become a marketable option. Would you be willing to eat it?

Esther - August 21, 2013 at 7:15 PM

I agree, the article is very unclear in that matter. I'd be willing to try it. To make it part of my diet everyday? Probably not. I'd like to know if there are any long-term health consequences...

Friday, August 9, 2013

Take Out

So today, I went out for lunch at Noodles & Company on my way back up to Muncie. As I ate, I realized this might be one of my last times eating out for a while. Even though my project does not start for another week, I am going to be cooking and preparing for it starting now. So basically it will be easier to follow my new regime instead of spending more money on takeout.



I decided to go with buttered noodles with Parmesan chicken, in the larger size. Trying to be economical I was about to save half for dinner tonight, which saved me money overall. I also had a coke with lunch, which is rare for me. I don't think I will miss it much during this project.

Sorry for the short post, but I am still working on getting Internet at my house. You can look forward to a post on my first shopping day for groceries for the project as well as an update on how my first trip to the farmer's market goes tomorrow.

Friday, August 9, 2013

Shopping Day 1: Target

I decided today that I would start getting ingredients for my project. Since I was going to Target, I decided to focus on the basics: flour, sugar, salt, etc. I also wanted to get oatmeal and rice. Simple enough, right? Not so much. Apparently, the Target in Muncie does not have a very large grocery section. I managed to find flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and milk. Did you know that Target sells its own name brand of organic flour? This was news to me. Good news. I even told the cashier out about it on my way out.



I got Target brand "Archer Farms" organic milk for a good price, about 50 cents cheaper than Horizon Organic milk. It is nice when supermarkets have their own generic that is organic, as it makes things cheaper for me. I also got Arm and Hammer baking soda, Clabber Girl baking powder, and Morton salt. These three are so chemically simple that I don't even want to bother trying to find a different or certified organic version.

I did not get sugar yet as I am unsure if there is organic sugar or better quality version than what target carried. Let me know if you have any ideas. I also could not find plain oatmeal in the store and the rice selection was so small that I better try somewhere else.

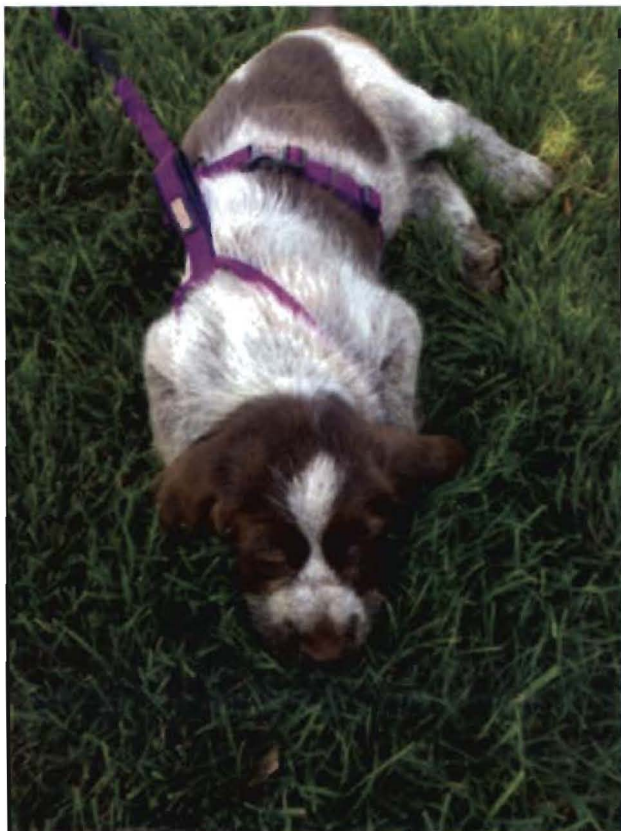
On another note, I'm starting to make an Excel sheet cataloging every food item I buy so I will be able to better calculate how much each meal will cost.

Tomorrow I am off to the Minnetrista Farmers' Market and will blog about it afterwards.

Saturday, August 10, 2013

Shopping Day 2: Farmer's Market and More

Today I went to the Minnetrista Farmer's Market with my friend Beth. I did not have a grocery list in mind, as I wanted to first see what was available.



This is Rosie; she was soooooo sleepy :)

The first thing I got was green beans. Maybe stir-fry would be good or I can just eat them raw. They were only \$1.50 a pound. I also got onions and garlic, which should last me a while (or at least more than one week). And of course, it is the time for corn, half a dozen for 2 dollars. Later the vendor for "My Dad's Sweet Corn" gave me a free ear to try. Vendors are so nice! The only fruit that I picked up was some peaches, as I want to wait until the apples are a little bigger and berries are getting pricey.

I also got to meet some new friends, both the two legged and four legged kind.

This afternoon I went to Marsh to see if they had a better selection of ingredients for baking. Although they did not have organic flour like Target did, I did find Domino's Organic Sugar as well as organic olive oil. So far, the olive oil has been my most expensive purchase at \$12.59 for the 16.9 fl. oz. bottle. This translates to 12 cents per teaspoon. My

least expensive baking item so far is salt at 0.6 cents per teaspoon. It will be interesting to see how these calculate into the overall cost of a loaf of bread or stir-fry.



My lunch at the Downtown Farm Stand.

My final stop was at The Downtown Farm Stand, which is similar to a Whole Foods or Earth Fare, although a lot smaller. Some of their prices for organic ingredients were much higher than what I found at national chains. For instance, the packaged sugar was twice as much. I was able to find bulk rice, oats, and beans for \$1-3 a pound. I also got four sticks of butter. I put three in the freezer so that they will last longer.

On that note, I am research an app for my phone to track the expiration dates of my food, so that I will use it up before it goes bad. Let me know if you have any suggestions!

Comments:

Catherine - August 17, 2013 at 8:31 PM

Indiana corn is delicious! Really, it's not the same in Wisconsin.

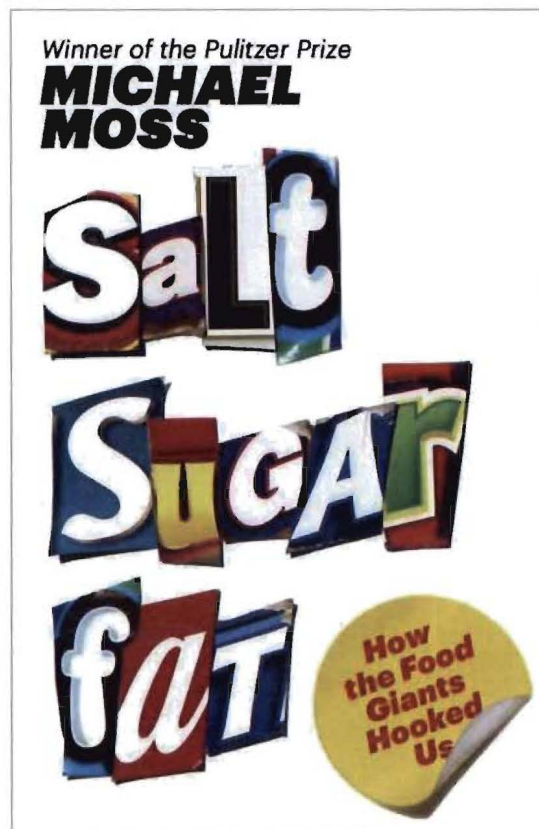
Christine Kincaid - August 17, 2013 at 9:30 PM

But I was able to find Wisconsin butter! And it was a grocery chain. It is organic and really yellow.

Monday, August 12, 2013

Sugar, Salt, Fat and ... Bliss

For my fall semester at Ball State University, I am not taking typical classes, as some of you know. Instead, I am participating in a seminar at the Virginia Ball Center for Creative Inquiry. Here I am taking a 15 credit hour seminar entitled "Sustainable Agriculture and Policy Making". Although the title may sound intimidating, 14 other students and I along with Dr. Wolfe, our supervising professor, are exploring agriculture, its impact on our lives, and how policy fits into the picture.



For this class, we are reading five books, one of which is Salt Sugar Fat by Michael Moss. I just finished reading it yesterday and can say that I was intrigued and entertained the whole way through. He details "how the food giants hooked us" on processed food by formulating the salt, sugar, and fat levels to the perfect bliss point. The bliss point can be defined by the amount of sugar, for example, that we find pleasurable. It is at the brink of being too much, but just enough to make us want even more.

I do have a reason for explaining all of this. Today I had a harrowing time activating Internet and cable (automating help center we all know to well). Frustrated and wanting to feel better I reached for some dark chocolate. This had a calming effect, most likely due to

the sugary nature of the candy. Afterwards, I was still craving something that instinctively I knew would make me happy... cheese. With all that fat and sugar, it makes sense.



I trotted off to Fazoli's, a restaurant that I will not be able to frequent starting next Monday, and ordered myself a baked Alfredo. After eating some, my taste buds were humming and I was feeling happy and relaxed. This lines up with what Michael Moss said in his book, we eat these foods because they make us feel happy. I guess I will need to find a way to fulfill this desire when I cut out processed foods. Let me know if you have any ideas for savory dishes!

Sources:

Moss, Michael. *Salt, Sugar, Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us*. New York: Random House, 2013. Print.

"Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry, Ball State University - Ball State University." *Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry, Ball State University - Ball State University*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 Aug. 2013.

Wednesday, August 14, 2013

First Time for Everything... Pickles

So yesterday, I went down to Conner Prairie Interactive History Park to do a film shoot for an advertisement. After that was complete, I perused the gardens to see how things were growing. Earlier this spring I helped plant the seeds, so it is cool to see your hard work pay off with produce. As I explored the Conner Garden, my coworker Michele showed me the heritage world vegetables that they were growing including Poona Kheera cucumbers. They originate from India and vary in color from green maturing to orange and brown. She even gave me one to take home and use in my project.



I decided the best way to taste and preserve this cucumber so that I can eat it once the project starts would be to pickle it. I asked coworkers Martha and Leander for advice, as they are much more experienced cooks for me. This is how the recipe boiled down to what I used:

- 1 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1/2 cup water
- 2 1/2 tablespoon of sugar
- Salt and pepper to taste

I will be honest; I am not fond of pickles, the few times that I have eaten them. I opted for a sweeter pickle in the theory that it would be more palatable. In a few days, I will taste them and let you know what I think. Take a look on page 40. For now, they will sit in the fridge and will be good for 2 to 3 weeks. This whole experiment cost me \$0.69.



Thursday, August 15, 2013

Eggplants... Oh My!



So today, I decided to use the eggplant that I purchased yesterday at the Minnetrista Farmer's Market. I will admit that I have never cooked with eggplant, let alone eaten it before. This was going to be a challenge.



Fried eggplant attempt.

Through my Google searching, I found that eggplant is most commonly fried, so that seemed a reasonable plan of action. I got my eggs, flour, and eggplant peeled and sliced. Many recipes warned that the eggplant needed to be salted to draw the moisture before frying. I should have listened. I have a tendency to improvise when I cook and this does not always result in good food. As the eggplant fried, it soaked up a lot of the olive oil and became soggy instead of crispy. I may or may not try this again.

Thankfully, my dinner experiment was more successful. I needed to use the other eggplant (yes I thought it was wise to buy 2 even though I had no idea what to do with them at the time, they looked pretty). I had four small potatoes, a yellow squash, and onion. I decided to roast them in the oven with some olive oil, garlic, and oregano.

It turned out better than expected, I was even able to portion it out to eat later and freeze some (reheating that will be another adventure). I learned today to follow the directions of the experts when it comes to cooking something that I have worked with before. It is also alright to fail, as it is a learning experience.



Comments:

Jane - August 15, 2013 at 9:04 PM

Pretty sure after you draw out the moisture, fried eggplant is still just a disc of fried something. I've never met an eggplant I was fond of. Better luck next time.

Christine Kincaid - August 15, 2013 at 9:32 PM

Well you don't know you don't like something until you try it :).

Beth - August 15, 2013 at 9:35 PM

Yes, definitely salt the eggplant before frying. Not only does it draw out moisture it can also get rid of some of the bitterness. Good job trying! Its fun to try something new, even if it doesn't always work out!

Christine Kincaid - August 15, 2013 at 9:37 PM

I had no idea they had so much liquid in them. They remind me of mushrooms. Could you use eggplant as a mushroom substitute?

Catherine - August 17, 2013 at 8:29 PM

Next time you should try eggplant lasagna. I've made it before and it's quite good. :)

Christine Kincaid - August 17, 2013 at 9:29 PM

Catherine, I saw a recipe for it, but did not have cheese or tomatoes for lasagna.

Saturday, August 17, 2013

Sugar

Although I have found a temporary solution, I am still perplexed on what type of sugar is cheap, ethical, and organic that I can use for this project.

Right now, I am using Domino's Organic sugar that I found at Marsh. Organic means it was made from organic sugarcane, but this does not dictate how the sugar is harvested and processed. It means that this sugarcane has not been sprayed with pesticides, while Domino's regular brand most likely has. The regular brand is most likely what all of you use for sugar. When I perused the aisles at Marsh and Target, it was the only other type of sugar there except for the generic. I have also noticed that this sugar has a different flavor, similar to that of caramelized sugar, and the crystals are larger and brown. When I made blackberry muffins today, it baked the same and there was no flavor difference with the finished product.



Another friend suggested that I check out Sugar in the Raw. From some research, I had discovered that it is not raw (meaning unprocessed). The package claims that it has not been bleached (I guess that is how we get our pretty white sugar). There does not seem to be anything spectacular about the product so I shall move on to another sugar.

While trying to Google sugar, I came across recommendations for sucanat (an abbreviation for sugar-cane-natural). It is an unprocessed sugar that has been used in India for some time. Basically, it is dehydrated cane sugar. This is the least processed of the sugars so far. I also learned that through processing, manufacturers are able to refine the sugar so that the product sold is around 99.9% sugar compared to sucanat at 88% (the other 12% are calcium, iron, potassium, and vitamin B6, but not enough to actually gain nutrients from).



Another option I have is honey. Today at the farmer's market I got honey made in the same county that I now live in, you can't get more local than that. I also believe that there is minimal processing to get honey from the hive. It did seem a bit expensive to be using daily.

Finally, I want to talk about a company called Wholesome Sweeteners that I just found today. They have a whole line of organic sugars and raw sugar. Their sugar is not genetically modified (YES!) and they are not burned, a practice that Sugar in the Raw may use. It is also fair trade. For those of you

who don't know, fair trade means that the farmers get paid a fair price for their goods and therefore are able to make a living farming. This by far seems to be the best choice for sugar, but I need to compare the prices.

Price per Pound: *

| | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Domino's Organic Sugar..... | \$5.33 \$3.55 |
| Sugar in the Raw..... | \$2.67 |
| Sucanat..... | \$3.15-\$10 |
| Honey..... | \$4.00 |
| Wholesome Sweeteners Organic Sugar.... | \$3.99 |

*All of these are estimated prices, most from the manufacturer's website. I could have found many of them cheaper on other sites.

This brings me to the conclusion that while not the cheapest, I want to go with Wholesome Sweeteners Organic Sugar as it is Fair Trade and organic which are two goals with my project. I am also not breaking the bank to make these choices. Which one would you choose? Do you care where your sugar comes from?



Edit 8/21: I calculated the price for Domino's Organic Sugar from their 1.5 lb. bag originally. The recalculated price makes it cheaper than Wholesome Sweeteners Organic Sugar. This result does not change my opinion of which sugar I would like to buy.

Sources:

"Organic Sugar." *Sugar Products, Baking Tips, Sweet Recipes, & More*. Domino Sugar, n.d. Web. 17 Aug. 2013.

"Organic Sugar." *Wholesome Sweeteners*. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Aug. 2013.

"Sugar in the Raw Raw Sugar, 24-Ounce Bags (Pack of 12): Amazon.com: Grocery & Gourmet Food." *Amazon.com*. Amazon.com, n.d. Web. 17 Aug. 2013.

Comments:

Jane - August 18, 2013 at 8:02 AM

You might want to look into the processing on the honey. There is actual significant processing for commercially sold honey (what you would find at the store), but you should definitely ask the merchant at the farmer's market what he/she does. Raw honey is completely unprocessed, and there might be other steps for local. (I'd love to know more about that as well.) I do remember that I was cautioned against raw honey when I was pregnant due to something that might not be processed out...

Christine Kincaid - August 18, 2013 at 9:05 AM

I think I remember the seller saying it is raw honey, but that is not stated on the bottle. The bottle does say not to feed to infants < 2 years old. I will have to ask the vender next week for more details on how it is made.

Jane - August 18, 2013 at 7:22 PM

And then you will post all of that information for your on-the-edge-of-our-seats readers. :)

Christine Kincaid - August 18, 2013 at 9:22 PM

Stay tuned for Sugar Part 2 ;)

Lori - August 19, 2013 at 3:21 PM

I've been using coconut sugar. The package says that it's sustainably grown, but I haven't done the research to verify that.

Catherine - August 19, 2013 at 7:45 PM

I know you have a plethora of historical knowledge. I know back in the 1800's, sugar was an expensive and precious commodity. Where did they get their sugar and how was it processed? How similar was it to sugar we use today and to the sugars you have been researching?

Christine Kincaid - August 19, 2013 at 9:49 PM

Coconut sugar, I have never heard of it. I will look it up!

Catherine, just off the top of my head, sugar came in cones or loafs, brown was cheaper than white. Molasses was also used as a substitute as well as maple syrup. I will see what else I can find up. I do know that I have prices written down somewhere c. 1830.

Jane - August 21, 2013 at 5:36 PM

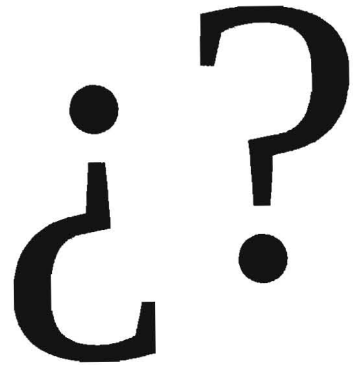
Also (for your sister), sugar wasn't used as often as it is now. They didn't feel the need to sweeten everything. Where I like to drop a little sugar into my biscuits... they wouldn't have.
12 1/2 cents per pound for loaf sugar; 16 cents a pound for cone sugar. I worked utility in the store Sunday. :)

Sunday, August 18, 2013

There's Always an Exception to the Rule

It has come to my notice that there are cases in which the rules that I have put down for this project may be too strict. If you have not read the rules, go to the rule tab. Family and friends have mentioned, "What if you get sick? What if you go home for the weekend or on a trip?". I plan to answer these in this post.

First, what if I get sick? This could be caused by a flu or cold, or worse food poisoning from my cooking. Now I hope that none of these will happen. For me, I have found the best food remedies have been orange juice, Sprite, and saltine crackers. During this project, I am going to take the means necessary to get better if I am sick. So, if I were to toss my cookies, yes I would go and get some sprite and OJ and perhaps some crackers so that I feel better. Life happens, so I must be willing to deal with it properly. If any of you have any less processed alternatives that make you feel better when you are sick, please let me know!



The second concern is when I visit my folks or go on a trip, both of which are likely to happen this semester. When I go home, I hope to cook some of my meals from scratch or visit the farmers market there. However, as a college student, if my parents offer me food for free versus the cost of me buying ingredients, I will most likely take the free food (as long as it is not too processed, i.e. soda etc.). It is more economical this way. I will be home in two weeks, so I will blog then how I work through each meal.

What about trips? I will be at the mercy of the restaurants around me and some prepacked snacks. Hopefully restaurants will have less processed options, like a veggie salad without dressing that I can choose off their menu. This will make an interesting blog post when I come to it :).

If you have any more questions about what I am doing, please post them in the comments below!

Comments:

Lori - August 19, 2013 at 3:18 PM

I always have to have chicken noodle soup, saltines, and coke when I am sick. I've had to break from my special diet a couple of times this year because of sickness. :)

Christine Kincaid - August 19, 2013 at 9:44 PM

It is good to know that I am not the only one.

Monday, August 19, 2013

Day 1

So here is a recap of my first day fully on the project:

Breakfast

- 1/2 cup rolled oats - \$0.06
- 1/2 cup Raspberry Yogurt (Trader's Point Creamery) - \$0.68

Lunch

- 2 small red potatoes - \$0.31
- leftover green beans - \$0.00
- 1/2 container baked vegetables (potato, eggplant, yellow squash) - \$0.28

Dinner

- 1 cup 2% milk - \$0.47
- 1 corn on the cob - \$0.33
- 3 biscuits - \$0.83

Total

= \$2.96

I was surprised, breakfast did not keep me very full. I ate at 7am and was hungry by 10am. Maybe I should eat more. I had one of my potatoes from my lunch for a morning snack. Then I was not hungry for all of my baked vegetables, only eating one container. The eggplant still does not thrill me. Dinner was better. I did not have much of an appetite today, most likely because it was the first day of classes. I hope to soon make soup or something more filling. Let me know if you have any ideas!

Comments:

Jane - August 19, 2013 at 10:31 PM

I am trying to outcomment my mom on my Facebook by commenting on your blog.

Anyway.

Protein? Are you also tracking your nutritional intake along with cost in order to maintain a healthy diet? This sort of nutrition isn't sustainable in your own body.

How do you plan to bring in healthy protein? Organic nut butters? Organic meats? Today was just a start, I know, just keeping all over you.

Christine Kincaid - August 20, 2013 at 7:54 AM

Not to worry. I already had a friend already bring the absence of protein up. I have eggs and milk. No meat yet (still trying to figure that one out) and I have no beans as of yet (but know where I can get some). Peanut butter would be a great idea!

Wednesday, August 21, 2013

Today's Haul

Today after classes, I went to the Farmer's Market. It runs on Wednesday as well as Saturday. There are fewer vendors, but I do appreciate the smaller crowd that attends. Having a farmer's market on Wednesday also helps if I have already eaten through what I had bought on the previous Saturday.

So, what did I get today?

- Medium cantaloupe - \$2.00
- 1 lb. green beans - \$2.00
- small head of cabbage - \$1.00
- 11 green apples - \$4.00
- butternut squash - \$1.00

Total: \$10.00

I already made 4 apples and the butternut squash into a soup. Total cost of the soup was \$3.62 with approximately eight servings.

That is \$0.45 per serving!! The downside is that I do not really like the soup. I will make myself eat it, but I was not expecting a sweet soup. My taste buds are in a mood for something more savory. It will be good to use in my lunch along with biscuits to balance the flavors. How would you cook a squash?

Comments:

Catherine - August 22, 2013 at 12:57 PM

You can always freeze the soup until you are in a more sweet soup mood. I don't know how to do much with squash except spaghetti squash. You literally take the whole spaghetti squash, poke some holes in it with a knife, and stick it in the oven for an hour maybe? (You can look up the time online). Then once it's cooled a bit, cut it in half and scrape out the innards, which form long thin pieces kind of like spaghetti. Add some seasoning, maybe butter, and enjoy :)

Mary - August 22, 2013 at 8:25 PM

Yes, I think butternut squash is often roasted in the oven with butter and brown sugar. I am usually more in the mode for savory as well. Tomorrow I'm going to roast some yellow summer squash with some zucchini and mushrooms. I might also put some eggplant in there. I'll put some salt and pepper and probably some rosemary, thyme & oregano in there too. Yum!

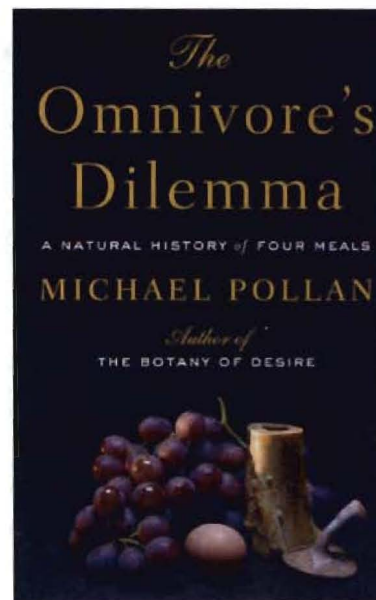


Wednesday, August 21, 2013

Is "Organic" a Magic Word?

As my seminar has been reading through *The Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollan, I have been really struck by the chapters on industrial organic agriculture. Even though I had considered myself well versed in agriculture before this class, I was not aware of the scale of these corporations. Honestly it disheartens me that our generation is led to believe that "Organic" is the magic label that must mean the food is good and comes from a pretty farm where everything is good.

According to the USDA, "Organic agriculture is an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity. It is based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain and enhance ecological harmony." The labeling does not guarantee that there is no residual residue of pesticides etc. They say the labeling is to promote health. But we take it to mean health for the plants and animals (such as no pesticides and pasture grazing) equally as much as health for us (no contaminants). "Organic" has turned into a social issue.



I was saddened that the chickens were harvested at 7 weeks of age, only having 2 weeks access to the outdoors through a tiny door at one end of the "factory". (Producers are afraid of these chickens being infected with pathogens if they have access to outdoors younger than 5 weeks. This is a drawback of not using antibiotics.) Once I learned this fact, I want to reconsider the labeling on my organic chicken before I purchase it. I now know that organic does not mean pasture raised. That would be a better indicator to look at on the label. Next time I go to the Farmer's Market I will be more inclined to ask about the living conditions of the animals before I buy the meat. I will still buy meat that was raised without daylight, but at least now, I am informed.

What do you think?

Sources:

Pollan, Michael. *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin, 2006. Print.

"Organic Production and Organic Food: Information Access Tools." *National Agricultural Library*. United States Department of Agriculture, n.d. Web. 21 Aug. 2013.

Thursday, August 22, 2013

A Deviating Lunch

So today was the first instance that I had to step away from the rules for this project. My classmates and I visited Becker Farms for a field trip today. We got to have a tour of the farm, help feed the animals, and get an insider's point of view of what it is like to farm in a sustainable way.



Chickens!

The Becker's were wonderful hosts; they even provided us with lunch. There was lemonade, beets, turkey and noodles, mashed potatoes, cantaloupe, and chocolate chip cookies. There was also salad but I could not eat it due to my food allergy to bell peppers.



Yummy lunch!!

I made the decision that I would be gracious and accept the food provided and eat it. We did have the option to pack a lunch. I decided not to do this, as it was not cost effective. One aspect of this project is feeding myself on a college budget, which means accepting food when offered sometimes. Kyle Becker said everything was made there except for the noodles. Even the turkey was raised on the farm. This made me feel better about eating the food. It was also nice not to have to prepare a meal; all I had to do was enjoy it.

Something surprising that I noticed is that I felt full and satisfied after the meal. I did not crave more food just for the sake of eating it. I also did not salt any of the food I ate. I did not even feel compelled to eat extra cookies like I used to. I do not know if this is due to my project so far or that the food was not as processed as, for example, the food in the dining halls here at school. I hope to be able to cook as well as Mrs. Becker!



My new friend :).

Source:

"Becker Farms | Home." *Becker Farms*. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Aug. 2013.